

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS, Pt. 2

Habakkuk 2

Last week, we began our look into the book of Habakkuk, one of the twelve books in the Bible known as the Minor Prophets.

Habakkuk argued with God and seemed for a moment to forget who it was he was talking to. He had cried out to God for some period of time, begging God for an answer – begging God for relief from the violence and injustice that dominated the nation of Israel.

God did finally answer Habakkuk, but the answer sent Habakkuk into an even greater sense of confusion. God said that His plan for dealing with the sinful behavior of the people of Israel was to destroy them.

This was not what Habakkuk had expected. He was asking for a spiritual revival that would bring the nation to repentance. Instead, God answered with retribution.

I know that many of you pray daily for our country and for God to send a revival or a spiritual awakening that will bring us back from what appears to be the edge of destruction. Imagine our response if God answered by allowing the USA to be destroyed by Islamic extremism and terrorism.

Habakkuk continued to argue with God.

This was a characteristic of God that either Habakkuk had never been taught or that he had never understood when it was taught. This message from God seemed to violate the character of God that Habakkuk had always understood and taken for granted.

He said to God (v. 13), “Your eyes are too pure to look on evil and you cannot look on sin. So how can you look upon such an event as this and not say something when the wicked devour those who are more righteous than they?”

He was confused and angered by such a response from God, but soon came to realize that the best thing was not to continue to argue his point, but to stand still and wait for God to explain what all of this meant.

Even though he felt that his argument was justified, in chapter 2, verse 1, Habakkuk quits arguing for the moment and begins listening.

I say “for the moment” because Habakkuk says, “While I am waiting for God to answer, I will plan how I will answer Him when He reproves me (or when He gives His counter-argument).” In other words, he hasn’t given up his argument with God.

Then, God gives His answer to this second argument of Habakkuk. And once again, the answer was not what Habakkuk expected. He felt like God would continue to explain himself, and then Habakkuk would continue to argue his point.

Instead, God simply told Habakkuk what He wanted him to do.

Write the vision...

Why write it? Why not just stand and proclaim it from memory. It had certainly made such an impression on Habakkuk that he would never forget it.

- The Lord instructed Moses to write down how Israel miraculously defeated the Amalekites “for a memorial.” (Ex. 17.14)
- Moses instructed the people to write the commandments “upon the posts of your houses and on your gates” for the purpose of teaching their children. (Deut. 6.6-9)
- God commanded Isaiah and Jeremiah to write down their prophecies in a book or on tablets. (Isaiah 30.8; Jer. 30.2)
- The Apostle John was instructed in the Revelation to “write the things which you have seen” – to “write for these words are true and faithful.” (Rev. 1.19; 21.5)

Write the vision...

Vision refers to what someone has seen.

- It refers to revelation – this new thing you have learned about God.

Even though it violates your concept of My holiness, I will use whatever instrument I choose to carry out my will.

- It refers to prophecy – this coming thing that I will bring to pass.

God was warning the people of impending doom through His prophet, Habakkuk. Now it was time to deliver the message.

and make it plain upon tables,

“Make it plain” is simply Greek for “make it plain.” Write it so that it is legible, but also that it will be remembered and understood.

“Upon tables” refers to the prominence of the message. Make it readily available to everyone by posting it in prominent places. Today this might read “Put it on a bill board” or “Post it on Facebook” to make sure that everyone reads it.

that he may run that readeth it.

Some have interpreted this verse to say that the vision should be written so that it is easily read by someone who is running past. But this statement is more about the content of the message and the expected response to the vision than it is about the form the message is supposed to take.

“Readeth” means

- to cry out or cry aloud
- to proclaim or preach
- to call, summon, or invite.

So the sense of the message is that Habakkuk is to write the message on wooden boards so legibly or so easy to understand that whoever reads it will then run to proclaim it and share it with whomever they come into contact.

The word that is translated as “readeth” in this verse is the same word translated “call” in...

Joel 2:32 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered...

The message of the Gospel is plain and it is simple: God loves humanity and sent His Son to die on a cross so that men everywhere might be saved (*that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD*). But for men to hear the message, it must be proclaimed by those who hear it and experience God's gift of grace.

It is the only message of hope for a lost and dying world, and we, as recipients of God's grace, should so understand it that we run to proclaim it. It's what Jesus meant in the Great Commission when He said, "As you go make disciples..."

For the vision is yet for an appointed time,

God reminds Habakkuk that judgment belongs to God and that it will happen, though on His schedule, not the schedule that is set by Habakkuk or by the people of Israel.

Here is a reason for writing the vision down. God says, "I don't want you or the people to forget that I have spoken this prophecy and that this thing will happen."

Furthermore...

...at the end it shall speak...

When the time is exactly right, the vision – the word of God – will "speak" – meaning that it will "blow out or breath out" – a concept closely tied to the role of the Holy Spirit.

Here the meaning is that the vision or the message of God, whether through the spoken word of God's messenger or through the written word of God, is powerful and cannot be prevented.

When spoken or read, the word of God has the power to convert the human soul from its condition of death to the position of life eternal.

and not lie:

God's word does not deceive or disappoint or fail. It will accomplish all that He has set for it to accomplish, for His word does not return unto Him void (unsuccessful).

Just because God's judgment doesn't happen immediately does not mean that it will not come in time. It will happen at the exact moment that God has planned for it to come.

...though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.

Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him:

God now takes a look back to Babylon, the nation He plans to use as His instrument of judgment, and calls attention once more to their pride – the ultimate cause of their downfall.

"Since he has elevated himself to the level of a god through his pride (the same sin that Adam was guilty of), then there cannot be found in him any righteousness."

Pride is a sin that God will not tolerate in any person. It is a sin that God detests and hates. The prideful person finds his security in the things he himself produces. He believes that he has within him all that is needed to be successful. He sees no need for God or salvation or church or any of that other religious stuff. He will make his own way in the world.

But that is not the way of those who put their trust in God.

but the just shall live by his faith.

Those who are righteous will not require that God prove Himself at every crossroads or have to explain His motives and His purposes when He acts.

“The just shall live by his faith.”

To paraphrase verse 4, God is saying...

“Habakkuk, I don’t think I like the tone of your petitions. You have accused Me of failing to act when and how you think I should have. Your pride is as offensive to me as the pride of the pagan Babylonians. You need to be humble and to walk by faith. My ways are higher than your ways, so trust in Me.”

The just man – the righteous man – shall live by his confidence and trust in God. The Babylonians are coming and will remove the nation, but not forever. This is only for a season – the same thing that is true of all of life’s adversities.

God is calling the nation to live with absolute confidence in God which will sustain them and cause them to persevere.

The just shall find the greatest joy of life – “in great disasters or dangers, when others are at their wit’s end” – because of their faith – their total confidence and trust in God.

Here in this short phrase is the Old Testament anticipation of the Gospel message of Jesus Christ.

Paul quoted this verse on three occasions in the New Testament (Rom. 1.17, Gal. 3.11; Heb. 10.38) to say that true joy of life and confidence for living comes through God’s gift of salvation in Christ Jesus. It will never come by our merit or works.

“Now I will make my indictment against Babylon and enumerate for you both their sins and how I will judge them.”

There is in these next 15-16 verses the promise of the wrath of God, but as always, there is also the seed of redemption. God is telling Habakkuk and the nation of Israel that I will not leave you in bondage.

I am the Redeemer and the just shall live – they shall live by faith. I know them by name and will always deliver. There will never be a time when I do not have a remnant who knows me as Lord and whom I will bless and protect and deliver and who will overcome the conqueror.

v. 4-5 The Babylonians are a proud people. They are consumed by drink and never stay home. They are as greedy as the grave and as difficult to satisfy as death.

At first they are greedy, then they are covetous, then they become murderous and wicked in order to acquire more and more satisfaction in possessions and accomplishments.

His search and desire for wealth will only end in woe.

v. 6-8 Woe to him that increases that which is not his by burdening himself down with “thick clay.”

Soon the prideful covetous man has “ladeth himself with thick clay” – the burden of that which cannot buy happiness, the things made of earth, whether gold, or silver, or precious

stones – will become a burden that weighs him down to death and destruction and retaliation by those he has oppressed.

There is in this verse a very critical indictment of our own times. The verse refers to “increasing what is not his...through the burden of heavy debts, easy credit, and unsecured loans.”

A family or a business or a country that measures success by what it can or has purchased through debt and credit is only fooling itself and postponing the inevitable.

v. 9-11 Woe to him that coveteth – who seeks to build his security in earthly treasures. The very houses you build will testify against you in the day of judgment.

When we put our security in things of earth – in houses and lands and mortgages – be assured that there is coming a day when the debt will have to be repaid and all of those goods will become as one who mocks because we cannot sustain such an economy.

v. 12 Woe to him that builds a town with blood and establishes a city by iniquity. Your violence will come back on you and all of your treasures will be destroyed by fire.

Nebuchadnezzar built one of the most impressive cities the world had ever seen, but he did so by the murder and oppression of thousands upon thousands of his enemies. In the end, no matter the greatness of Babylon, this city which had stood since the Flood was destroyed during the reign of his son.

In verse 14, God himself breaks out into song, celebrating His ultimate victory over the Babylonians specifically, but over all sin and iniquity in general.

Hab. 2:14 For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

Ultimately, everything comes back to this one thought – that everything that happens in this world is meant for one thing – to give glory to Almighty God. He will not share His glory with another and He will not tolerate sin or idolatry. Just read the first two of the Ten Commandments.

v. 15 Woe unto him that gives his neighbor drink so that he can take advantage of his nakedness.

When the morals of a country are so destroyed that alcohol and sexual perversion are the rules of the day instead of the exception, then that country can count the days until they are destroyed.

This is certainly an appropriate image of Babylon, which fell to its enemies during a night of reveling and sexual indulgence.

v. 19 Woe unto those who practice idolatry, who worship manmade objects made of wood and stone – idols carved out of things of earth have taken the place of the God of heaven.

For us, they may not be made of wood and stone, but more likely of metal and rubber or electronic circuits. It all may look good on the outside, but on the inside is only emptiness.

All that man may acquire or make of himself, all of it is as empty space and will be blown away at the slightest wind.

Then once more we are drawn into the presence of the Almighty and the fullness that dwells in Him. **(v. 20)**

Psalm 46:10 Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!